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United States Department of State

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Washington, D.C. 20520

January 12, 1990

The Most Rev. Peter Gerety,
Office of the Archbishop Emeritus,
60 Home Avenue,
Rutherford, New Jersey

Dear Archbishop Gerety:

I have been asked to respond to your letter of last December 12 on behalf of the President. We appreciate your deeply felt expression of concern over U.S. policy toward China, and also appreciate the opportunity to share with you some thoughts about the President's policy.

In response to the tragic bloodshed of last June in Tiananmen Square, the President made clear from the very start that the U.S. does not condone the appalling violence used to suppress peaceful demonstrations, nor does it condone the repression that has followed. To demonstrate our opposition to those actions of the Chinese leadership, we suspended key parts of our relationship with China and took effective steps to protect Chinese students here in the U.S.

In speaking out against the violence and expressing our strong commitment to the protection of human rights, the President said that we stand with those who seek greater freedom and democracy around the world. To make this commitment concrete, and not mere words, the President has sought to avoid reacting to the tragedy of June by taking actions which would only make things worse for the Chinese people. Rather than break off dialogue with the Chinese government, the President has sought to engage PRC leaders to cease repression, and to preserve and sustain the free flow of people, ideas, information and commerce between the U.S. and China.

Such links between the Chinese and the outside world have contributed to China's past decade of reform progress. These relations can be the very lifeblood of societies, such as China's, that are still in search of modernization and reform. The millions of Chinese who demonstrated last June were dramatic evidence that there is broad support—among the populace and among governing elites—for continued reform and opening to the outside world. We want to preserve the kind of interaction that has bolstered this commitment to reform.

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Were we to take steps in the direction of breaking off all contact and reducing relations across the board with China, we would be lessening our ability to restrain the impulse of some Chinese leaders to withdraw into hostile isolation. We would reduce our ability to exercise any influence that might mitigate repressive practices.

China is an ancient and proud society. Its leadership is complex and diverse; no one can predict with certainty how U.S. policy will affect internal leadership dynamics. Rather than embroil ourselves in confrontation—which may serve no one's interests—we have an obligation to try to deal effectively with these leaders to advance U.S. interests. To be effective, it is necessary to remain engaged, not further divided by a downward spiral of confrontation. The Chinese people would pay the highest price for the intensified isolation that could ensue.

Though continued dialogue with China's leadership has drawn strong criticism, it is the best way to advance our interests not only on human rights but also on other key issues in the international arena that are of great importance to the U.S.

Despite some assertions to the contrary, we do not see U.S. policy toward China as a choice between human rights and our vital geostrategic interests. We seek to advance our interests across the board. The U.S. interest in a China that is stable and plays a responsible role in contributing to global and regional peace and stability is very real. China's central position in the Pacific Basin is of vital concern to the U.S. and to all those nations whose economic and security interests will be affected by China's policies. China's Asian neighbors, in particular, are concerned that China play a stabilizing role in the region.

On the global stage, China's policy on missile proliferation is particularly critical. Our efforts to curb the dangerous proliferation of missiles and missile technology to unstable areas of the world necessitates our continued dialogue with China and other nations to promote international cooperation on this pressing issue. China's recent statement that it will not transfer intermediate range missiles to the Middle East is very important in this effort.

In Asia, the continuing tragedy of Cambodia requires that we sustain our dialogue with Beijing as an essential part of the search for a comprehensive solution. Our ability to work with China to promote stability on the heavily armed and volatile Korean Peninsula continues to be important. These are vital interests to the U.S., the important states of ASEAN and other key friends and allies such as Japan and Australia.

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To sum up our thinking, the range of important interests at stake in US relations with China necessitates that we not break off contacts with PRC leaders. Nevertheless, it is clear that U.S. relations with China are not normal. We continue to maintain key parts of the relationship in suspension. While we are open to exploring ways to improve the atmosphere of our relations, we have made it clear that China must take positive steps. We hope that there will be more such steps -- such as China's recent lifting of martial law in Beijing -- that will lead in a positive direction, for the Chinese people and for U.S.-China relations.

We appreciate the depth of your concern and hope that the thoughts presented in this letter will be helpful to you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Kent Wiedemann", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Kent Wiedemann
Director,
Office of Chinese
and Mongolian Affairs

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